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Mrs J Watson
Headteacher
St Matthew's CE VA Primary School
Portman Road
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Dear Mrs Watson

Ofsted monitoring of Grade 3 schools

Thank you for the help which you and your staff gave when I inspected your school on 31 January 2008, for the time you gave to our phone discussions and for the information which you provided before and during my visit. Please also pass on my thanks to the pupils and governors for their help during the day.

The school context has changed since the previous inspection. In the last two years, many children who are at the early stages of learning English have joined the school. The headteacher and key staff are successfully working in partnership with another school to ensure provision for these pupils is matched to their needs. Additional teaching groups have been established to help new arrivals settle in quickly and learn English. Standards have improved since the previous inspection, particularly in Key Stage 2. More pupils are reaching the higher Level 5 in English, mathematics and science; last year proportions were equal to the national average in English and above in mathematics and science. Pupils' achievement also continues to improve. Year 6 pupils who left the school in 2007 made better than average progress from their starting points in Year 2.

This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

As a result of the inspection on 31 October and 1 November 2006, the school was asked to: improve the quality of teaching to make it at least good in all year groups; ensure that work set for higher attaining pupils is matched well to their needs; focus more precisely, in all subjects, on the development of pupils' speaking and listening skills; and, ensure that the procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are used consistently and are accurate.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time the school is making good progress in addressing the issues for improvement and in raising the pupils' achievement.

Action taken to strengthen aspects of teaching, such as planning and differentiation, has improved the overall quality of lessons. Pupils now receive a majority of lessons which are now good or better. A robust monitoring and evaluation programme has been established and regular lesson observations, scrutinies of planning and sampling of pupils' work are completed by senior leaders. These are used well to provide teachers with detailed feedback on their work and to identify points for improvement. Key teachers have been deployed across the school and training has been organised to improve teachers' subject knowledge, for example for teaching phonics. Some teachers have received additional guidance on how to make their lessons more effective and there are plans for staff who regularly teach good or outstanding lessons to be observed by their colleagues. The school has identified that more consistency is still required in teachers' use of assessment to inform their planning and in the quality of marking.

Provision for more able pupils has improved well. The leadership team has organised training and purchased additional resources to help staff provide suitable challenges for higher attaining pupils. Teachers' planning clearly identifies the separate activities provided for different groups, including extension work for able pupils. In lessons, teachers and teaching assistants focus their questioning and assessments on challenging more able pupils. Enrichment groups have been set up for small groups of Key Stage 2 pupils to extend their independent and cooperative learning skills in English and mathematics. Some able pupils in Year 6 have also had the chance to work with pupils from other primary schools in mathematics and science challenges organised at the local high school. The proportions of Year 6 pupils gaining the higher Level 5 in English, mathematics and science have improved well in the last two years and are now at or above average.

There are improved opportunities for pupils to develop their speaking and listening skills, although the school acknowledges that this issue has received less attention than the other three. Staff have received training and observed demonstration lessons on how to incorporate more speaking and listening activities in their lessons. Opportunities for pupils to answer questions and discuss their work were mostly good in the lessons observed during the inspection; some teachers encouraged pupils to talk in pairs to stimulate responses to the questions they asked. There are more opportunities for pupils to develop their communication skills in assemblies, through drama lessons, in class and school council meetings and in performing arts productions. Significant emphasis is also placed on helping pupils who are at the early stage of learning English to develop their spoken language.

Pupils' attainment and progress are now tracked thoroughly. A useful schedule has been drawn up to record the assessments that are made throughout the year. Staff have received training and support on how to assess accurately and they now have a clearer understanding of the rates of progress pupils are expected to make. Teachers make regular assessments of pupils' progress in English and mathematics. The outcomes of these assessments are recorded systematically and then analysed by the leadership team. The information is used well to identify any pupils who may be underachieving, so that suitable intervention programmes can be organised to help pupils catch up. Teachers' performance management targets include a target for pupils' achievement and the leadership team intends to strengthen accountability systems further by expecting teachers to attend the termly data analysis discussions.

The school continues to focus on evaluating and improving the assessments made in the Foundation Stage, including the outcomes of those made by pre-school settings.

I hope that you have found the visit helpful in promoting improvement in your school.

Yours sincerely

Rob McKeown
Her Majesty's Inspector